

NEITHER INATTENTIVE LEARNERS NOR FORGETFUL GUESTS: THE IWAKURA EMBASSY IN THE NORTH-WEST, 1872

Alex J. Robertson

In the autumn of 1872, the cities of Liverpool and Manchester together with several other communities in the North-West had the opportunity to play host to what must then have been one of the most exotic groups of visitors the region had encountered, in the form of the Japanese Imperial Embassy led by Ambassador Extraordinary Iwakura Tomomi.¹ One hundred and twenty-five years ago, the members of the Embassy indeed made their landfall in Britain at the Prince's landing stage in the port of Liverpool, arriving from New York aboard the Cunard screw steamer *Olympus* on 17 August to be met by the Queen's Special Commissioner and whisked off immediately to London to meet Her Majesty and her ministers. The Mayor of Liverpool, explaining the relatively low-key that characterised the Embassy's welcome to the city, regretted that it was not customary to accord an official civic reception to visitors of their standing before they had been presented to the Queen herself.²

Despite the fact that many of the Queen's ministers were on the grouse moors rather than in their offices in London, it was to be almost another six weeks before His Worship had the opportunity to offer the guests the full benefit of Liverpool's civic hospitality.³ Returning to the port city from the capital on Sunday 29 September, the Embassy spent the next four days there before moving on Friday 4 October 1872 to Manchester. Between times, they had made brief excursions to Birkenhead, Crewe and St Helens. In Manchester, as in Liverpool, Iwakura and his suite were received with full civic ceremonial by the Mayor and Corporation, who had laid on a programme for their guests which combined industrial and technological instruction with culture and moral improvement. Before leaving Manchester for Scotland on Wednesday 9 October, at least one prominent member of the group had managed to add physical amelioration as well, by taking the waters at Buxton.

Background

The Iwakura Embassy had been despatched from Japan nearly eight months before its arrival in Britain, having set sail from Yokohama for the United States just before Christmas of 1871.⁴ The interval between that embarkation and their landing in Liverpool the following August had been spent visiting America's major industrial, commercial and administrative centres and in extended diplomatic negotiations in Washington with the administration of President U.S. Grant. The Embassy was regarded by the new Japanese regime headed by the Emperor Meiji, which had overthrown the decadent Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868, as a critical initiative in Japan's own modernisation and in her relations with the rest of the world. Accordingly, its membership was large — more than fifty people when account is taken of its logistical tail of secretaries, clerks, interpreters and baggage-handlers — and included some of the most eminent and energetic of the new political leaders of Japan, including senior representatives of every department of the central government. Iwakura himself

was a member of the Imperial Grand Council, and had been his country's Foreign Minister in 1871 at a time when the western threat to Japanese independence was perceived to be very powerful, and when the management of Japan's foreign relations was a key concern. The names of his most immediate colleagues — Associate Ambassadors Ito Hirobumi, Okubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi and Yamaguchi Naoyoshi, Commissioners Tanaka Fujimaro Sasaki Takayuki and Yamada Akiyoshi — belong among the highest echelons in the pantheon of the new bureaucrats responsible for Japan's modernisation in the Meiji Era. This was no body of political nonentities and diplomatic hacks, but a delegation of key figures in the new leadership of Japan.

Iwakura's Embassy was not the first mission of its kind to be despatched abroad by Japan. Even in the time of the Shogunate, between 1854 and 1868, there had been official delegations sent overseas to observe, record and report back upon western industry and technology and so on. Indeed one such delegation had visited Liverpool in 1862, an event reported in the local press in terms either patronising or crudely satirical.⁵ But the Iwakura Embassy was by far the biggest and most ambitious of these efforts, with the broadest scope and the most extensive itinerary. It was also arguably fundamentally different in style and intent from previous missions, these differences being symbolised by the decision of the senior members of the Embassy to dress in the western rather than the Japanese style, thereby



Iwakura Tomomi, Ambassador Extraordinary of Japan, 1872



Harry Parkes, British Minister in Japan at the time of the Iwakura Embassy.

signifying their commitment to the conversion of their country into a modern nation state. The importance attached by the Japanese Government to their mission may be gauged by, among other criteria, the cost it incurred in sending the Embassy abroad. This came to more than one million US Dollars — a huge sum for a government which had not yet organised its revenue-base and taxation system, which lived with a large and chronic excess of expenditure over receipts, and whose currency was of dubious value and stability.⁶ Indeed, so insecure was the economic, fiscal and political position of the Meiji regime in 1871 that to send so many of its key personnel overseas for so long and at such expense was a gesture of truly heroic standing. It was also, of course, an indication of how much the Japanese had to learn, and how urgent they perceived the task to be.

During their visit to Britain, Iwakura and his colleagues were generally accompanied wherever they went by two official British “mincers”. One of these was Sir Harry Parkes, the irascible British Minister in Japan.⁷ Parkes had been responsible for arranging the broad outline of their programme, and had the job of steering them through some of the more ceremonial aspects such as their presentation to Queen Victoria and their discussions with Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary. At Sir Harry’s suggestion, Lord Granville had also appointed a retired Royal Marine, Major General Alexander, “to communicate with the Embassy, and on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government to assist them in making arrangements during their residence in this country . . .”⁸ The General was that Queen’s Special Commissioner who met the Embassy on its arrival in Liverpool from America and whisked its members off to London to be presented at Court. He was constantly in attendance until the Embassy departed these shores for the Continent. There was a third figure who attached himself to Iwakura’s party during its visit to Britain, however, who was not one of Lord Granville’s appointees. This was Iwakura Tatsuo, son of the Ambassador Extraordinary,

who had earlier been sent to England to complete his education. Many young Japanese were sent overseas at this time by their government to be introduced to western educational methods and acquire a knowledge of western arts and technology. Indeed, when Iwakura left Yokohama, his Embassy was accompanied by a group of such students, including the first Japanese girls to study abroad. It was more common, however, for these students to be sent to America than, like Iwakura’s son, to Britain.⁹

The visit of the Iwakura Embassy to the North-West of England in October 1872 was, in all conscience, only a brief interlude within an epic journey of eighteen months duration altogether. By the time they returned to Japan in September 1873, Iwakura and his associates had visited not only the United States and Britain, travelling extensively in both, but had also taken in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland. Their original plans had also provided for visits to Hawaii, Spain and Portugal, but in the event these countries (no doubt to the relief of the Ambassadors) were removed from the itinerary. What was the purpose of this extended peripatetic mission which removed from Japan at a delicate juncture in the country’s development so many of the leaders of reform?

Modernisation and Diplomacy

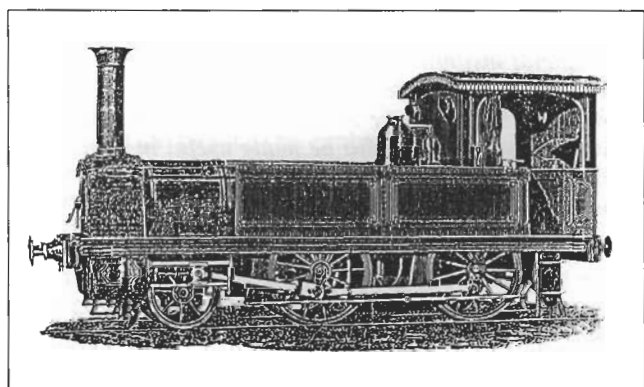
The functions of the Embassy were, according to Professor Ian Nish, largely determined by Iwakura himself.¹⁰ It was partly concerned with furthering Japan’s economic, political and administrative modernisation by giving some of her leading advocates of reform the opportunity to study at first hand the way things were ordered in the West. At the same time, there was a powerful diplomatic motivation behind the establishment of the Embassy: to raise Japan’s diplomatic profile among the western nations and to seek the enhancement of her status in their eyes. The two things went together in Iwakura’s mind: the enhancement of his country’s diplomatic position would depend on her ability to modernise her structures and institutions in ways which the West would recognise and respect. This dual motivation behind the mission was no secret from the Embassy’s hosts. The *Liverpool Weekly Albion*, for example, summarised the position the week after Iwakura’s arrival in Britain in terms he himself could hardly have bettered:

... this embassy, both in respect of the rank of its members and the character of its mission, is invested with greater importance than any previous commission from that country. The special objects and designs of the Embassy are two-fold — first, to prepare the way for a revision of existing treaties between Japan and the Western Powers; and secondly, to obtain much information from a scrutiny of the social, commercial, political and financial institutions of the various nations with which Japan now has diplomatic relations as may not only be of service in the revision of the treaties with them, but may also be made useful in bringing the country to that standard of development at which it aims.¹¹

Modernisation was a matter of great urgency for the leaders of the Emperor Meiji’s new regime from the moment of its establishment in 1868. Since 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy had forcibly broken down the policy of seclusion which had been maintained since the seventeenth century by Japan’s Tokugawa rulers, the Japanese had been put under enormous

pressure by the western powers to grant commercial, maritime, financial, diplomatic and jurisdictional concessions which threatened completely to undermine Japanese sovereignty and reduce the country to the status of a colony or protectorate. It had been the question of how to respond to these pressures, indeed, which had led in 1868 to the overthrow of the Tokugawa system of government and its replacement by a restored imperial regime. The Japanese had been keeping an eye on what had been going on in China since the Opium War of 1839–40, and had no wish to see their own country suffer the same humiliation and subordination. But although they had from time to time tried to fight back against the pressures from the West, they had been unable to match the military and naval might of countries like Britain, America and Russia. As a result, the Japanese had been forced to concede a series of treaties which imposed upon their country forms of humiliation similar to those suffered by China. Japanese ports were forced open to foreign trade and shipping. Tariffs were dictated to Japan at rates preferential to the western powers and could only be changed with the permission of those powers. Western banks and commercial houses like Jardine, Matheson & Co monopolised the finance and trade of Japan. Foreign residents in the country were subject, not to the jurisdiction of Japanese laws and courts, but to their own laws administered by their own consular representatives.

It was a consuming ambition of the radical young samurai who dominated the Meiji Government in its early days to throw off these “Unequal Treaties” and recover Japan’s right to control her own destiny.¹² To achieve this, they realised that Japan had to model herself on the West, imitating the economic, military and administrative structures of the western powers to an extent sufficient to allow her effectively to resist further western pressures. This was what lay behind the fifth article of the Charter Oath sworn by the new Emperor in April 1868: “Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world,” he pledged, “to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.”¹³ The Iwakura Embassy was intended to give effect to this pledge in a way that involved some of the regime’s most prominent members assessing at first hand the technological, legal, administrative and military underpinnings of western power and considering how they might be adapted to Japan’s needs. The Embassy was also intended to impress the western powers with Japan’s intellectual openness and zeal for modernisation, and hence her worthiness of more liberal treatment than she had so far been accorded in the “Unequal Treaties”, or at least to establish what would be expected of the Japanese in the way of reforms which would enable them to secure substantial modifications to the treaties.



The Engine, 24 February 1871

The first railway locomotive in Japan, shipped from the Vulcan Foundry, Newton-le-Willows, 1871.

North-West England and Japan

Contacts between the North-West of England and Japan were already fairly firmly established by the time the Iwakura mission set sail from Yokohama, and there was already even a tiny colony of expatriate Lancastrians to be found on the island of Kyushu. Liverpool shipping lines had been among those which had taken advantage of the opening up of Japanese ports in 1854–55, and British shipping remained a dominant force in Japan’s maritime trade right up to the eve of the First World War.¹⁴ The first railway in Japan, the line from Tokyo to Yokohama completed in 1872, was financed by a loan floated on the London money-market, and equipped with locomotives built at the Vulcan Foundry in Newton-le-Willows, the first of which had been shipped out to Japan in 1871.¹⁵ There was a particularly strong connection between the North-West and Japan through the infant Japanese factory cotton industry. When the Lord of Satsuma decided in 1866 to establish Japan’s first modern mechanised cotton-spinning mill at Isonehama on Kyushu Island, it was to textile engineers and technicians from the North-West that he turned for equipment, advice and training to realise the project, and above all to Platt Brothers of Oldham. His second mill, established near Osaka in 1869–70, was set up with help from the same source. From 1866 onwards, indeed, Lancashire textile engineers and fitters were a constant presence in Japan, and their technical contribution to the development of the country’s modern cotton industry was crucial — as well as being, in the very long term, highly disadvantageous to the cotton industry of Lancashire itself.¹⁶ So Lancashire’s contribution to Japan’s modernisation was already significant. It was also, apparently, known to Iwakura, who referred in a speech at Manchester Town Hall to the fact that Japan had “already called upon this city for help” and would probably need still further practical aid from it.¹⁷

The Embassy in the North-West

In both Liverpool and Manchester, the visits of the Iwakura Embassy were officially hosted by the local authorities, the Mayors and Corporations of the two cities, whereas during their brief stopovers in Birkenhead, Crewe and St Helens their hosts were companies or individuals. The Chambers of Commerce and other local commercial and philanthropic bodies, for example the East Indian and China Association of Liverpool, also had prominent parts to play in the Embassy’s programmes in both cities. The programmes themselves can truly be described as full and varied, if not always entirely coherent and in some respects, perhaps, reflecting more the interests and concerns of the hosts rather than the guests. It may be useful to present a straightforward narrative of the Embassy’s experience between Sunday 29 September, when its members arrived in Liverpool from London, and Wednesday 9 October, when they left the North-West for Scotland.

Iwakura and his colleagues travelled from London to Liverpool late in the day of 29 September, arriving at Lime Street station at 10.30pm to be greeted more or less without ceremony by two senior police officers and W.G. Aston, an attaché from the British legation in Japan, who conducted them to the North Western Hotel. Their first full day in Liverpool, Monday 30 September, was taken up principally with ceremonial. At noon, Iwakura — wearing, as the press noted, a “truly American hat” — and his colleagues were driven in four carriages from their hotel amid loud applause from a substantial crowd to the City Hall to be received by the Mayor and a numerous party of local dignitaries

including the Member of Parliament, the Chairman of the Dock Board, the President and Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, the Chief Constable and many prominent merchants and shipowners. The Mayor, in full civic regalia, made a short but cordial speech of welcome, expressing the city's earnest wish "to reciprocate the good feeling your Excellency, we understand, desires to cultivate", to which Iwakura replied in equally brief but positive terms, with Aston from the Tokyo legation acting as interpreter.¹⁸ The Embassy were then conducted through the City Hall — meeting on the way more of Liverpool's commercial and shipping elites — to the Queen's Balcony where they acknowledged the applause of a numerous crowd. The evening was taken up with a formal banquet, again in the City Hall, hosted by the Mayor and attended by 150 guests including Lords Derby, Sefton and Skelmersdale. In the afternoon, however, the Embassy had been treated to a demonstration of fire appliances in front of St George's Hall, presided over by the Chairman of the Watch Committee and watched by thousands of spectators with the Police Band in attendance. This instructional activity had been followed by a visit to Sefton Park.

The remainder of the Liverpool programme, over the three days from Tuesday 1 October to Thursday 3 October, was much more closely concerned with introducing the members of the Embassy to the foundations of Liverpool's commercial and maritime prosperity. On 1 October, the delegation was taken to the docks by the Mayor, to view the grain elevators and the new Sandon Graving Dock. By way of the North Fort, where they were received with full military honours by Major Maycock and the garrison, they then proceeded to board the Cunard steamship *Cuba* to be received by the company's Chairman, Charles McIver, and entertained to lunch "on the most sumptuous scale" with a plethora of toasts. It may have been in a mild alcoholic haze, therefore, that the members of the Embassy continued their programme in the afternoon with a visit to the newly built Allen Line steamship *Polynesian* in the Wellington Dock, which was about to sail on her maiden voyage the next day, followed by inspections of the tobacco warehouses (where one of the Associate Ambassadors noted that even Japanese tobacco was on display) and of the Sailors House, a hostel for seamen.¹⁹ After a visit to the St George's Hall, the members of the Embassy returned to their hotel to prepare for the pleasures of the evening, when they attended — once more in the company of the Mayor — a performance of *Medea* at the Alexandra Theatre starring Mrs Bateman.

Thursday's schedule continued the combination of culture and utility. The day began with the presentation at the North Western Hotel by members of the Liverpool East India and China Association of an address, "beautifully illuminated... and enclosed in a red morocco case, appropriately lettered in gold". Then followed a visit to the City Museum and Free Library, after which the Embassy inspected a new lifeboat of radical design before boarding the Liverpool Dock Board's steam tender *Alert* at Prince's landing stage for a sail down river towards New Brighton during which they were honoured by a nineteen-gun salute from the North Fort. *Alert* then turned back upriver and docked on the Cheshire side, at Birkenhead, where Iwakura and his friends were given a tour of the Laird Brothers shipyard conducted by John Laird, MP, himself. From Laird's, the Embassy proceeded to the Morpeth Dock to inspect the Pacific Steamship company's new vessel *Tacora* and partake of luncheon aboard the *SS Republic* of the Oceanic Line. Lunch, with the inevitable "complimentary toasts", was followed by a visit to four training ships

moored in the Sloyne, in the methods of which (the *Daily Post* recorded) Iwakura himself took a particular interest. Three members of the delegation, meantime, had gone on a separate visit to Lyle's sugar refinery, where "They took great interest in the process of sugar refining and made notes of all the most modern machinery". The day was rounded off by a dinner hosted by Liverpool Chamber of Commerce at the Adelphi Hotel, remarkable for the warmth expressed in the speeches made on both sides, to say nothing of the numerous toasts that were drunk. The Chairman of the Chamber, proposing a toast to Iwakura, expressed the fervent hope and wish that "in the annals of his country he will occupy the same place which we in ours assign to Sir Robert Peel (loud cheers)."

Fortunately, the members of the Embassy had been granted the grace of a late start the following morning, visiting yet again St George's Hall at 11.00 am, this time for an organ recital of works by Liszt and Mendelssohn. At noon, they took the train to Crewe, to visit the London & North Western Railway Company's engine works to see the manufacture of rails and locomotives. Returning to Liverpool at six in the evening, Iwakura and his colleagues then gave a farewell dinner at their hotel for the Mayor of Liverpool, who had indeed been most assiduous in the attention he had accorded to his guests and had accompanied them throughout their visit to the city, and a few of the local notables. After dinner, rather surprisingly, the company then set off for the circus, and were reported to have derived "a good deal of amusement" from the performances of, among others, Mlle Marilla ("the female Hercules") and Mr James Gee "the celebrated somersault rider".

At 9.30 on the morning of Friday 4 October, the Embassy left Liverpool by train to travel to Manchester via St Helens, where they inspected the Sutton Oaks glassworks. The *Daily Post* in its valediction expressed the sympathetic hope that in Manchester "for their bodily strength's sake, they will not have such a heavy task as they have voluntarily imposed upon themselves during the first four days of this week". And indeed their programme in Liverpool had been hectic and demanding, on their physical stamina, their intellectual concentration and, not least, on their digestive systems. The press coverage, particularly by the *Daily Post* had been extensive and very positive, and there could have been no doubt of the genuine interest that had been shown by the Mayor and the leading representative bodies of the Liverpool commercial community in their visitors. Even the general public seems to have applauded enthusiastically whenever the opportunity occurred. How would they fare in Manchester?

Arrival in Manchester

The welcome accorded to the Iwakura Embassy on their arrival in Manchester at least was more formal and ceremonial than they had received in Liverpool, in the sense that they were met at Victoria station by the Mayor and members of the Corporation. But then they had arrived in Manchester in the middle of the afternoon, not at half-past ten at night as had been the case in Liverpool. The Ambassadors' visit to Liverpool had been fairly fully reported in the Manchester press, and had engendered enough interest among the citizens for some to write to the newspapers suggesting things which might be included in their programme in Manchester. No doubt the Sub-Committee of Manchester Corporation which had been established to set up the programme duly took note of these suggestions.²⁰ The Sub-Committee had done its job conscientiously, and the Ambassadors could not hope — as

the *Liverpool Daily Post* had done on their behalf — to have an easier schedule in Manchester than in Liverpool. Every day was full, usually from 9.30 am until 10.30 pm, with official engagements of one kind or another.²¹ The only respite came on Sunday 6 October, a day of rest which Kido Takayoshi occupied by accompanying Sir Harry Parkes to Buxton — after, of course, attending church — on a visit that seems to have been purely recreational and included an eight-mile hike over Axe Edge Hill, an experience that left Kido bemoaning his lack of exercise since leaving Japan.²²

It seems fair to say, however, that the Manchester programme placed rather less emphasis on the industrial and commercial aspects of the city—though there were, of course, a number of factory visits and contacts aplenty with the mercantile community through, for example, the Chamber of Commerce. On the other hand, efforts seem to have been made to give the members of the Embassy greater insights into the social and moral aspects of life in Manchester, by means of visits to the Assize Courts (civil and criminal), the County Gaol, the City Police Court and a school. The Ambassadors were also introduced on two occasions to representatives of the temperance movement. This prominence accorded to temperance in the programme was perhaps partly fortuitous: the Band of Hope happened to be holding its fifteenth Annual Festival at the Free Trade Hall on Saturday 5 October. The Ambassadors attended the evening session of the Festival, at which more than 350 local branches of the Band of Hope were represented, and were welcomed from the platform by the Chairman of the proceedings, Alderman Walthrow, Mayor of Stockport. Sir Harry Parkes replied on behalf of Iwakura.²³ But the temperance slant probably also reflected the interests and concerns of a number of prominent members of the Corporation: the President of the Manchester and Salford Temperance Union, for example, was a Manchester city councillor, William Harvey, JP.²⁴ In any event, there was a further encounter with the temperance movement on the morning of 7 October, when a delegation of officers of the United Kingdom Alliance for the Total Suppression of the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors called upon the Embassy at the Queen's Hotel and presented an address.²⁵ In the address, the Council of the Alliance rejoiced “to see the civilising inventions and commercial prosperity of the English race making their entrance into distant lands, [but] they have to grieve that there is one class of commodities for which our country has attained a sad notoriety, viz., intoxicating liquors,” and exhorted Iwakura to “use your utmost influence to prevent the importation into Japan of these deleterious drinks”. Iwakura, interpreted by Aston, replied that “. . . though we may not be able [through legislation] to exclude intemperance in Japan, still the moral power of your society may be exerted . . . to help our Empire and yourselves to that day when we may put aside every species of vice”.

Having arrived in Manchester and settled into the Queen's Hotel on the afternoon of 4 October, the Ambassadors were taken in the evening to the Theatre Royal, for a performance of Sheridan Knowles's comedy, *The Love Chase*, starring the popular comedienne Madge Robertson. As it was her benefit night, the house was so packed that the stalls had been extended to fill the orchestra pit, and the performance was reported to have kept the house in “roars of laughter”.²⁶ This was but the first dramatic presentation Iwakura and his colleagues were to experience in Manchester, for three nights later, on Monday 7 October — whether in response to “Plantagenet's” suggestion or by prior arrangement on

the part of the Corporation Sub-Committee — they attended a performance of *Henry V* at the Prince's Theatre. The start of the performance had to be delayed by fifteen minutes to allow the Ambassadors to take their seats, but the audience, the *Manchester Weekly Times* reported, “far from manifesting an impatience at the postponement, received the distinguished visitors with the utmost cordiality”. The performance, the paper went on, appeared to interest the whole of the Embassy extremely.²⁷ With two theatrical performances to one (admittedly plus a circus), Manchester could claim to have had the better of Liverpool at least in terms of the cultural content of the programme prepared for the Embassy.

But while social, moral and cultural activities may have figured rather more prominently in the Manchester than in the Liverpool visit, there was nevertheless in Manchester a solid core of activities related to the industrial and commercial life of the city. During the morning of 5 October, the members of the Embassy visited first Grey's cotton-spinning mill in Pollard Street, Ancoats, then Sir Joseph Whitworth's ironworks and gun-foundry at Openshaw. The machinery at Whitworth's, especially the giant presses, seems to have made a particular impression on the visitors, and a recent Japanese account observes that it was on this occasion that the Ambassadors truly realised the power of industrialisation.²⁸ On the next “working day”, Monday 7 October, the delegation visited two other large cotton mills, Hoyle's spinning mill and Birley's weaving sheds, and followed this with a visit to Macintosh's rubber works. And on their last full day in Manchester, Tuesday 8 October, they went to S. Watt & Son's clothing and hat factory, the Manchester Royal Exchange and the warehouse of Sam Mendel & Son, exporters of textiles to the Far East.

Ceremonial luncheons and dinners, however, were a less prominent feature of the Manchester schedule than they had been in Liverpool. Indeed, there were really only two such occasions, the first a banquet given by the Mayor and Corporation at the Town Hall on 7 October (prior to attending the performance of *Henry V*), and the second a dinner at the Queen's Hotel hosted by Manchester Chamber of Commerce. As in Liverpool, the speeches showed, on the British side, a pretty fair knowledge of what had been happening in Japan and a lot of goodwill (though tending to be expressed in slightly patronising terms) towards the Japanese efforts to modernise their country, as well as an appreciation of the commercial opportunities that Japan's opening up had presented to the merchants and manufacturers of the North-West generally. For their part, the Japanese seem to have been content to accept the master/pupil relationship which their hosts unconsciously imposed on them: they had, after all, been sent to the West to learn from it. Iwakura was always perfectly explicit about this, as in his speech to the City Council of Manchester on 7 October. Having referred briefly to the changes that had taken place in Japan after the revolution of 1868, he went on to say:

But we have not come to tell you these things. We have come in consequence of them, to learn from you. Our visit to your city is part of that extended circuit we are making in order carefully to study the institutions which seem to us to be the cause of your wealth and greatness. It is our intention to treasure up the knowledge we shall gain, so that we may follow the example of your energy and industry, which have made you so prominent among the nations of the world . . . We shall send

News

Gentlemen

Manchester

THE JAPANESE AMBASSADORS AND THE CITY COUNCIL. PRESENTATION OF AN ADDRESS TO THEIR EXCELLENCIES.

At a special meeting of the City Council, held yesterday afternoon, at the Town Hall, the Mayor (W. Booth, Esq.) in the chair, an address was adopted for presentation to the Japanese Ambassadors. The ambassadors, who were in attendance in an adjoining room, were then introduced by the Mayor, who welcomed them and expressed his sense of the importance of such visits, and his hope that such intercourse would promote goodwill between nations, and tend to prevent the occurrence of distressing and lamentable wars.—Mr. TANNER, the deputy town clerk, read the following address:—“To His Excellency Shonji Tomomi Iwakura, Ambassador Extraordinary and Junior Prime Minister of His Majesty Montsohite, Emperor of Japan:—May it please your Excellency,—We, the Mayor, aldermen, and citizens of the city of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster, beg to offer to you and to the distinguished members of your Embassy a cordial welcome on this your first visit to our city. We heard with much pleasure that your Imperial Master, the Mikado, ‘after careful study and observation,’ had become ‘deeply impressed with the belief that the most powerful and enlightened nations of the world are those who have made diligent efforts to cultivate their minds, and sought to develop their country in the fullest and most perfect manner.’ That, in accordance with this sentiment, you, by his command, have honoured us with your presence, with the intention of inspecting our countries, towns, and seaports, of comparing our manufactures and industries with your own, of examining the working of our parliamentary and municipal institutions, of studying our various religious, educational, and scientific systems, of visiting our railways, highways, and public works, of making yourself familiar with our system of finance, of freedom of trade, and of the influence of a free press, and also of the mode of administering justice and the management of our prisons. We have witnessed with the deepest interest the numerous and important changes which have lately taken place in Japan; a country whose written history and whose monarchy without a break reaches back over more than twenty-five centuries. Especially would we allude to the patriotic self-sacrifice of the Daimios in the surrender of their property to State purposes; to the abolition of a feudal system firmly established many centuries ago; to the greater liberty granted to the humbler classes; to the extension of higher education to women; to the abolition of the office of the Shogun, and to the labours of the Great Council in favour of a representative government. We cannot pretend to equal your people in the matchless finish and subtle delicacy of their work as shown in the polished lacker ware, in the richness and beauty of their silks, or the fineness of their porcelain; but we can offer you our manufactures, machinery, books, scientific apparatus, and works of art; and we hope that your sojourn will lead to a large exchange of these commodities. We trust that your visit will be prosperous, and productive of all the good which your wise and gracious Monarch desires.”

REPLY OF THE AMBASSADORS.

The JUNIOR PRIME MINISTER of Japan, read in his own language, a reply, of which the following is a translation:—“To His Worship the Mayor, the Honourable Aldermen, and Distinguished Citizens of the city of Manchester, Gentlemen,—We, the Ambassadors Extraordinary, on behalf of our Sovereign and our people, beg to express our thanks for this cordial welcome, and the generous hospitality extended to us and our suite by the city which you so worthily represent. There is much concerning the Empire of Japan which would doubtless be of interest to you, if we had time to speak of it. The revolution which brought us into new relations with the other nations of the world, the changes rapidly following that revolution, as well as the changes which are now slowly but surely working their way among the people—these are matters of which we should be as glad to speak as you to hear. But we have not come to tell you these things. We have come, in consequence of them, to learn from you. (Hear, hear.) Our presence here to-day is evidence of that. Our visit to your city is not of that extended circuit gentlemen met for commercial purposes. (Cheers.) He hopes very sincerely that the commercial transactions between this country and Japan may be largely increased. (Renewed cheers.) At the same time he desires to express to you, as a body of Englishmen, the feeling of gratitude he has towards us in England, for the kind reception which the embassy have met with ever since they put their feet on English soil. (Cheers.)

The ambassadors were afterwards shown through the building.

young men to your shores to be educated, as we have already done. We shall ask for your machinery, your engines, and such modern appliances as will help us to begin properly in this new stage of our national development.

Later on that day, replying to a toast to “The health of the Ambassador Extraordinary from Japan” proposed by the Mayor of Manchester at the Town Hall banquet, Iwakura expressed the hope that the Ambassadors might one day be able to reciprocate the kindness and hospitality they had received in Manchester, showing — in the words that provide the title of this paper — “that we have been neither inattentive learners nor forgetful guests”.²⁹ It was in a general atmosphere of goodwill, therefore, that Iwakura’s Embassy left Manchester on 9 October for Scotland, with the Mayor and members of the Corporation at Victoria Station to see them off.

Their departure from Manchester did not quite mean that Iwakura and his companions were finished with their business in the North-West of England. During their subsequent visit to the Midlands during the early part of November, they returned briefly to Cheshire to stay the night at Peckforton Castle, the home of Lord Tollemache, and to visit the salt-works at Northwich which seem to have impressed Kido particularly, not least because of the extensive overseas markets which they served.³⁰ On 16 December, the Embassy left England for the Continent, and after extensive travels there embarked on the long voyage home via the Suez Canal, the Indian Ocean and the East China Sea, taking the opportunity on the way to see the chief harbours of South Asia and the Chinese Treaty Ports. Iwakura and the main body of the mission arrived back in Japan in September 1873, Kido and Okubo Toshimichi having been detached and ordered home earlier by the Government in Tokyo.

Achievements and Influences

What had they achieved? Certainly not their main object of securing substantial modifications to the “Unequal Treaties”. US Grant’s Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, and his British counterpart Lord Granville politely but firmly rejected the idea, as did the Foreign Ministers of almost all the other countries Iwakura visited. In Britain, only one voice — that of Frederic Marshall who worked for the Japanese Legation in Paris — was raised in support of the Japanese case. In an article in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1872, he called for Japan to be treated as an organised and civilised state, equal to the Western Powers. But the idea was rejected with contempt in a counterblast by none other than W.G. Aston, who had so often acted as Iwakura’s interpreter during his visits to Liverpool and Manchester: “. . . it would be the height of folly,” Aston argued, “to grant such rights [as tariff autonomy and the abolition of extra-territorial jurisdiction] to a nation which at the present moment possesses no civil code at all, and whose system of criminal procedure is still barbarous and tainted with cruelty.”³¹ It was not until almost the close of the nineteenth century that Japan secured full restoration of sovereignty, following the implementation in 1899 of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation signed in 1894.

In terms of the economic, administrative and military modernisation of Japan the influence of the Iwakura Embassy is not particularly easy to distinguish. Certainly its members — above all Iwakura himself, but also Ito Hirobumi and Okubo Toshimichi — became extremely powerful within the Government after their return, and can

readily be associated individually with specific reforms.³² Ito, for example, was the moving spirit behind the establishment of a modern banking system in Japan under the Bank Regulations of 1874. Unfortunately, Ito's model was the highly decentralised American system of national banks, which turned out to be quite unsuited to Japan's economic conditions. The system had to be reorganised on more centralised lines after 1881 by Matsukata Masayoshi, who had not taken part in the Embassy. Okubo, perhaps the most powerful figure in the Government at the time of his assassination in 1878, was associated with a range of reforms, and can be credited perhaps to a greater extent than anyone else with enabling the new state — still in the process of forming its institutions — to overcome the threats posed to its modernising programme, and indeed its very existence, by the samurai rebellions of 1874 and 1877.³³ But even while the Iwakura Embassy was still engaged in its peregrination around the world, those left behind in Japan were putting a variety of reforms into effect, and it is difficult to be precise about the reforms which were peculiarly the product of the Iwakura mission and those which might have been implemented anyway. The task of distinguishing between the two is further complicated by the fact that the Ambassadors in the course of their travels were constantly meeting colleagues from Japan and were regularly in touch with the caretaker government back in Tokyo. The implementation of reforms arising out of the experience of participants in the Embassy, therefore, did not have to await their actual return to Japan.³⁴

What evidence can be discerned that the members of the Embassy were influenced specifically by what they had seen and experienced in the North-West of England? The impact of their visit to Whitworth's foundry in Manchester has already been mentioned,³⁵ and Okubo's biographer records that his subject "sent home glowing reports of his personal impressions of British industrial progress after visiting such places as the shipyards of Liverpool, cotton mills of Manchester and iron foundries of Glasgow", and so on.³⁶ Kido's diaries, by contrast, convey to me at least the feeling that by the time the Embassy reached the North-West, Kido was starting to suffer from a kind of technological overkill, that he had already seen too many steamships, steel-mills, foundries and textile mills and could evince little enthusiasm for his fresh encounters in Liverpool and Manchester.

After the return of the Embassy to Japan, commercial and industrial intercourse between the North-West of England and Japan continued to flourish and expand. By 1880, British shipping lines — with Liverpool firms like Lamport & Holt (Blue Funnel) prominent among them — had established that ascendancy in Japanese maritime trade which they were to continue to enjoy until the eve of the First World War.³⁷ Increasing quantities of Lancashire yarns and piece-goods, to say nothing of textile machinery, made their way out to Japan during the 1870s and 1880s in these ships, with not the least significant return cargo being young Japanese technicians and trainee managers making their way to the technical and commercial institutes of Liverpool and Manchester to learn their trades. Perhaps the most striking evidence of the importance to Japan of links with the North-West was to be found in the development of the modern Japanese cotton industry, which really got under way with the establishment in 1883 of the Osaka

Spinning Company. In effect, the design and technical specification of the Osaka mill was left entirely to Platts of Oldham, and even the very bricks for the mill's facade were imported from Lancashire. The commercial success of the Osaka mill inspired a host of imitators in Japan, and these new mills also depended almost entirely on Lancashire machine-makers (and Platts above all others) for their equipment. No less than 87 per cent of all the spindles installed in Japanese cotton mills in 1909 had been supplied by Platts. The small community of Lancashire engineers and fitters which had been established with the Isonohama mill of 1866 grew, as Japanese mills kept on as long-term advisers the English technicians who had come out initially to instal their machinery. Their influence also increased, as they exercised a powerful coordinating effect on the technical development of the industry by ensuring that "best practice" was rapidly diffused from mill to mill irrespective of differences in ownership.³⁸ With this technical help, Japan had become on the eve of the First World War the seventh largest producer of machine-made cotton goods in the world, capable of mounting effective competition if not against Lancashire itself then certainly against other western producers such as the USA.³⁹

There were other respects in which the industrial connections between Japan and the North-West developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, after the visit of the Iwakura Embassy. For example, several important units of the Japanese Imperial Navy which took part in the decisive battle of Tsushima in 1905, including the flagship *Mikasa*, were products of the Vickers shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness.⁴⁰ But neither the decision to order warships in the North-West nor the technological dependence of the Japanese cotton industry upon the textile engineers of the region owed much in any direct sense to the visit of the Iwakura Embassy. The textile connection was already established before Iwakura left Japan, and developed after the return of his mission not so much because of any direct decision taken by Government as because of the belief on the part of individual textile entrepreneurs like Yamabe Takeo (founder of the Osaka mill) in the superiority of British textile technology.⁴¹ This was a belief, of course, powerfully espoused by members of the Iwakura Embassy like Okubo, but the influence of their belief cannot be regarded as especially direct in this case. The purchase of warships from Vickers came in the 1890s, long after the direct influence of the Iwakura Mission had been dissipated, though it could be said to have been an effect of the Japanese decision, heavily influenced by the Iwakura Embassy's recommendations, to have its naval officers trained by the British as the world's leading exponents of sea-power.

Acknowledgement

I must express my gratitude to Lesley Graham and Jane Prince of the Greater Manchester Centre for Japanese Studies in the University of Manchester for allowing me to use their extensive collection of cuttings from the local press of Liverpool and Manchester referring to the Iwakura Embassy, and for identifying and translating the extract from *Yomiuri Shimbun* of 10 January 1996. I am also obliged to my colleague Michael Rose and to Terry Wyke of Manchester Metropolitan University for several valuable suggestions. Any errors of fact, interpretation or quotation are, of course, my own.

NOTES

- 1 Japanese names are given in the Japanese style, with surname first.
- 2 The Embassy's arrival was very fully reported in the Liverpool press: see for example *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18 August 1872.
- 3 As the *Liverpool Daily Post* editorialised on 30 September 1872, "The distinguished men who compose the Embassy have been to London and have found the capital out of town. They were treated as well as the circumstances would permit; but when people are not at home it is impossible for them to be hospitable."
- 4 For a conveniently brief outline of the Embassy's itinerary, see *Kodansha Encyclopaedia of Japan* (Tokyo, 1987), vol.3, pp.358-60. There are also useful general accounts of the Embassy in Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy 1869-1942* (1977), Ch.I; E. Siviak 'On the Nature of Western Progress: the Journal of the Iwakura Embassy', in D.H. Shively (ed.), *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1971), pp.7-34; and F.V. Dickins and S. Lane-Poole, *The Life of Sir Harry Parkes KCB, KCMG* (1894), II, pp.172-8.
- 5 See, for example, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 30 May 1862 for an overview, "The Moral of the Japanese Visit"; also *The Porcupine*, 31 May 1862 for a satirical notice that does not quite rise to the level of its contemporary, *Punch*.
- 6 The cost is given in the Kodansha Encyclopaedia entry cited above, note 4. G.C. Allen, *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (1981 edn), pp.41-8, succinctly describes the fiscal and financial state of early Meiji Japan.
- 7 For a character sketch of Sir Harry, see Hugh Cortazzi, 'Sir Harry Parkes, 1828-1885' in I Nish (ed.), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits* (Folkestone, 1994), pp.1-19.
- 8 S. Lane-Poole, *The Life of Sir Harry Parkes*, II, pp.173-4.
- 9 Chitose Yanaga, *Japan since Perry*, (Hamden, Conn., 1966), p.177, lists Iwakura's student companions. Okubo's son also joined him in England.
- 10 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, p.18.
- 11 *Liverpool Weekly Albion*, 24 August 1872.
- 12 The early Meiji regime was dominated by young samurai drawn especially from the great clans of Western Japan, Satsuma, Choshu, Tosa and Hizen, who provided the leadership in government administration, the armed services and even, to some extent, in business enterprise. Several members of the Iwakura Embassy, for example, Kido and Okubo, came from this background, representing the Choshu and Satsuma clans respectively. Iwakura himself was the son of a minor court noble in Kyoto, and had first made his mark in the household of the Emperor Komei there. See W.G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (1990), p.86.
- 13 R. Tsunoda, W.T. de Bary and D. Keene, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition* (New York 1958), p.644.
- 14 G.C. Allen and A. Donnithorne, *Western Enterprise in Far Eastern Economic Development*, (1962), p.220.
- 15 J.E. Hunter, *The Emergence of Modern Japan* (1989), p.112; *The Engineer*, 24 February 1871, p.126.
- 16 A.S. Pearse, *The Cotton Industry of Japan and China* (Manchester, 1929), p.18; G. Saxonhouse, 'A Tale of Japanese Technological Diffusion in the Meiji Period', *Journal of Economic History*, 34 (1974), pp.149-65. On the later conflict between Lancashire and Japan, see Alex J. Robertson, 'Lancashire and the Rise of Japan, 1910-37', *Business History*, 32 (1990), pp.87-105.
- 17 Manchester City Council Minutes, 8 October 1872, p.366. Sir Harry Parkes had earlier stated in a speech in Liverpool that Japan imported £2 million of Manchester goods and gave employment to 400,000 tons of British shipping: *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 October 1872.
- 18 This account of the Embassy's activities in Liverpool is based chiefly upon the reports published in the *Liverpool Daily Post* and the *Liverpool Weekly Albion* during the period of the visit itself. Unless otherwise attributed, quotations are taken from the *Daily Post*.
- 19 S.D. Brown and Akiko Hirota (ed.), *The Diary of Kido Takavoshi*, vol.II, 1871-74 (Tokyo, 1983), p.222.
- 20 One citizen, signing himself "Plantagenet", proposed to the Editor of the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (hereafter *Courier*) on 4 October 1872 that the Ambassadors should be treated to the performance of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, then playing at the Prince's Theatre. Motivating the suggestion was the idea that although the Ambassadors were chiefly concerned with England in its present state, "they cannot fail to be interested and impressed by the vivid and realistic picture of England as it was". There may have been a subsidiary motive, of outdoing Liverpool, involved.
- 21 This account of the visit to Manchester draws very heavily (as did that of the Liverpool visit) on accounts published in the local press. The *Courier* provided the fullest daily coverage, closely followed by the *Manchester Evening News*. Coverage by the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Weekly Times* was rather more cursory.
- 22 Kido, *Diaries*, II, p.227.
- 23 Parkes remarked that this was the first popular assembly in England at which the Ambassadors had been present, and expressed the hope, on Iwakura's behalf, that the Union would gather strength and encouragement in their good work. His speech was marked by loud applause. *Manchester Weekly Times*, 12 October 1872.
- 24 I am indebted to my colleague Professor M. E. Rose for information about local temperance organisations.
- 25 The meeting is reported in *Manchester Evening News*, 7 October 1872, and in the *Courier*, 8 October 1872.
- 26 *Courier*, 5 October 1872. The presence of the Ambassadors in the company of the Mayor was reported to have attached "additional interest . . . to the occasion".
- 27 *Manchester Weekly Times*, 12 October 1872.
- 28 Saburo Izumi, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 10 January 1996.
- 29 The reception at the Town Hall and subsequent banquet are fully reported in *Manchester Evening News*, 8 October 1872.
- 30 Kido, *Diaries II*, pp.246-7.
- 31 The debate is fully dealt with in T. Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: a Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation, 1850-80* (1987), pp.145-9.
- 32 Their influence is very ably described by Hunter, *Modern Japan*, Chap.10.
- 33 Curiously enough, Okubo had been much less enthusiastic about reform than some of his fellow-Ambassadors (notably Kido and Iwakura himself) when the mission left Japan in 1871. By the time they got back, in 1873, he was one of the greatest enthusiasts. Kido's zeal, on the other hand, seems to have considerably diminished. Masakazu Iwata, *Okubo Toshimichi: the Bismarck of Japan* (Berkeley, 1964), pp.162-3.
- 34 Kido, *Diaries II*, pp.198-249 records that Kido kept up a voluminous correspondence with Japan while he was in Britain with the Embassy, and received a regular succession of high-ranking Japanese visitors. Indeed, the daily entries often devote more space to these contacts than to the other business of the day.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.16.
- 36 Iwata, *Okubo Toshimichi*, p.157.
- 37 Allen and Donnithorne, *Western Enterprise*, p.220.
- 38 Saxonhouse, 'Japanese Technological Diffusion', pp.151-2, 162-3.
- 39 Robertson, 'Rise of Japan', pp.88-9. The potential Japanese threat to Lancashire was, however, just beginning to be recognised by a few in Manchester.
- 40 *Mikasa* is preserved as a national monument in the Japanese naval-base city of Yokosuka near Tokyo. Admiral Togo, whose flag she flew at Tsushima, had fought the British as a young samurai in 1864, and had then been trained as a naval officer by the Royal Navy.
- 41 Yamabe had spent six months receiving technical training in a Lancashire mill, and had written the standard Japanese textbook on cotton spinning — cribbed almost entirely from the English texts used to prepare students for the City & Guilds examinations in the subject: Saxonhouse, 'Japanese Technological Diffusion', pp.152-3.